

Damp and mould growth in homes

Most homes will be affected by condensation and possibly other forms of dampness at some point. However, certain activities can increase the problem.

What is condensation?

In both private and rented homes condensation and mould growth is often due to habits and lifestyle and is something that can be reduced or remedied by the occupant.

Cooking, washing, drying clothes indoors, even breathing – all produce water vapour that can only be seen when tiny drops of water (condensation) appear on colder surfaces such as walls, windows, ceilings or mirrors.

The 'amount' of condensation in a home depends upon three factors:

- How much water vapour is produced by the actions of you and your family?
- How cold or warm your home is?
- How much air circulation (ventilation) there is in your home?

Simply turning up the heating will not sort out the problem, this may only temporarily reduce condensation. All three factors may need to be considered to reduce the problem.



How do I prevent condensation?

You will need to take proper steps to deal with the condensation, but meanwhile there are some measures you can take right away. Wipe down the windows and sills every morning. Wring out the cloth rather than drying it on a radiator. Condensation channels and sponge strips can be bought at DIY shops. These channels are fitted to windows to collect the condensation and thus help prevent window frames from rotting and avoid damp forming under sills. Care must be taken to fit these devices properly.

Is condensation the only cause of damp?

It can also come from:

- Leaking pipes, wastes or overflows.
- Rain seeping through the roof where a tile or slate is missing, spilling from a blocked gutter, penetrating around window frames, or leaking through a cracked pipe.
- Rising damp due to a defective dampcourse or because there is no damp-course.
- These causes of damp often leave a 'tidemark' and you should have the necessary repairs carried out to remove the source of damp. If your home is newly built it may be damp because the water used during its construction (e.g. in plaster) is still drying out. If your home is damp for any of these reasons it may take weeks of heating and ventilating to dry out. Hiring a dehumidifier will help. If you do not think the damp comes from any of these causes, it is probably condensation.

1. How can I Produce less moisture?

Ordinarily daily activities produce a lot of moisture.

To reduce this:

- Dry clothes outdoors. Avoid drying clothes indoors or if you have to, dry them on a clothes aired in the bathroom with the door closed and either an extractor fan on or a window slightly open.
- Vent tumble driers to the outside (never into the home), unless it is the self-condensing type.
- Cover pans when cooking and do not leave kettles boiling.
- Do not use paraffin or liquid petroleum (bottled) gas heaters. They produce large amounts of water vapour and are very expensive to run.
- Always keep tropical fish tanks covered. Water evaporation from tanks can be severe.
- Try not to let pets sleep in your bedroom.
- If possible take a shower rather than a bath, if you do have a bath run cold water in the bath before adding hot water as this reduces the risk of steam being created.

2. How to remove excess moisture?

- Always wipe the windows and window sills of your home every morning to remove condensation. This is especially important in the bedroom, bathroom and kitchen – just opening the window is not enough.

3. How do I ventilate to remove moisture?

- You can ventilate a room without making draughts or causing it to become cold.
- To do this, you may only need to open the window slightly or use the trickle vent which will often be found on UPVC windows. This allows warm (but moist) air to escape to the outside and let in cool (but dry) air.

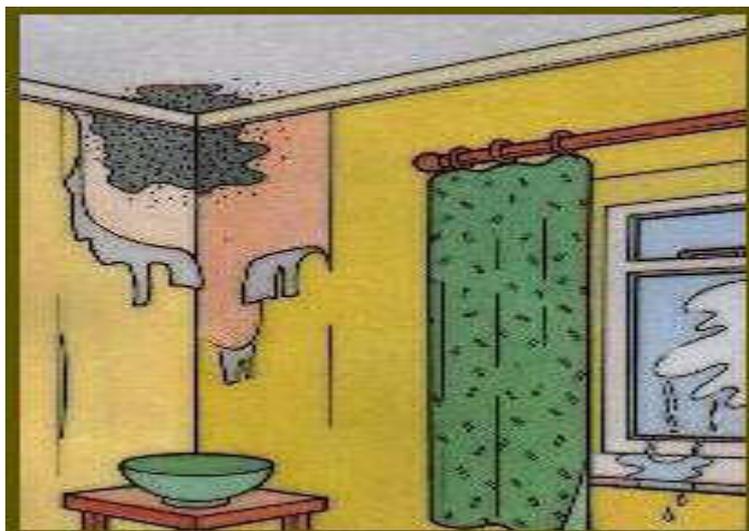
4. How to heat your home a little more?

- In cold weather, the best way to keep rooms warm and avoid condensation is to keep low background heat on all day rather than short bursts of high heat when you are in the house.
- Heating controls on your thermostat and timer will help control the heating throughout your home and manage costs.

5. How to deal with mould?

Black mould can grow on walls, ceilings, furnishings and even on clothes and toys, which can be expensive to replace.

- Carefully remove excess mould with a damp cloth and throw away after. Do not brush mould or use a vacuum cleaner as this releases spores into the air.
- Wipe down affected areas using an approved fungicidal wash or a diluted bleach which can be bought at most supermarkets – remember always use rubber gloves and wear safety glasses. A simple salty solution, that can be made by pouring salt into boiling water until it no longer dissolves, also does the same job.



- Tea Tree oil is a natural antiseptic and disinfectant but it's also great for cleaning, especially on mould or mildew. Try a dilute of three to four drops of Tea Tree oil in two litres of water (hot or cold). Soak mildewed items in the solution or spray onto trouble spots using a plant mister. Wipe, then rinse off. Always ensure you carry out a test on a small area of the fabric/material/surface beforehand.
- After treatment redecorate using a fungicidal paint or wallpaper paste – do not paint over using an ordinary paint. Dry clean mildewed clothes and shampoo carpets.

Health Effects

Some people are more sensitive to mould than others, and some groups are especially vulnerable. Additional effort should be made to keep away from damp and mould babies and children, elderly people, those with existing skin problems, such as eczema, or respiratory problems, such as allergies and asthma.

In order to reproduce, mould produces tiny particles called spores. Spores are carried in the air and may cause health problems if inhaled by people who are sensitive or allergic to them.

Symptoms include a running or blocked nose, irritation of the eyes and skin and sometimes wheezing. Occasionally, people may have more severe reactions. Very rarely, people may develop a mould infection, usually in the lungs. It is important to note that most people will not experience any health problems from coming in contact with mould.

For people with asthma, inhaling mould spores may cause an asthma attack. If you or your family members suffer health problems after coming into contact with mould, contact your doctor. In the case of a life threatening emergency, phone 000.



Remember the 5 Essential Steps

Produce less moisture



Remove excess moisture



Ventilate to remove moisture



Heat your home a little bit more



Deal with black mould



Further information and help

Please see links below for further information.

NSW Housing customers

For more information call the Housing Contact Centre on 1800 422 322, visit www.housing.nsw.gov.au, or visit your local FACS office.

Useful links for tenants and homeowners

[NSW Health fact sheet: Mould](#)

[Tenants NSW fact sheet: Mould](#)